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FILM REVIEW

SPECIAL

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JURASSIC PARK
sequel

Interviews with the
cast & producers of
THE LOST WORLD

THE LOST WORLD

JURASSIC PARK

SPECIAL
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BATMAN & ROBIN

Visual
IMAGINATION
PUBLICATION



out of the shadows

Batman's neon drenched third outing divided cinema audiences, who either loved or hated its radical departure from the previous movies' moody Gothic interpretation. Matthew Jones gives his verdict on *Batman Forever*.





DEEP IN a shadowy underground chamber, Gotham's greatest hero prepares for a night's work. The muscular figure pulls himself into a black rubber suit, and fastens a golden utility belt around his waist before striding towards a sleek futuristic vehicle, his cape billowing around him. It is the Batman.

An elderly figure steps out of the shadows, interrupting the Dark Knight before he can begin his nocturnal vigil. "Can I persuade you to take a sandwich with you, sir?", Alfred inquires, his voice full of concern for his young master.

Batman hesitates beside the enormous armoured batmobile. "I'll get drive-thru", he murmurs in a gravelled whisper.

Batman Forever is not an entirely serious film. In taking over the directorial reigns from Tim Burton, Joel Schumacher lightened up the tone as well as the sets for the caped crusader's third outing. There is a comic book feel to the movie, and none of the macabre grittiness of the first two films.

Once again, Batman faces adversaries from his comic strip adventures, this time it is the Riddler and Two Face. The story begins with the hideously disfigured Two Face, played by Tommy Lee Jones, robbing a safe on the top of one of Gotham's tallest skyscrapers. The robbery is a trap for Batman – Two Face is counting on the winged avenger coming to rescue the security guard hostage.

Answering the bat-signal, Batman deals with Two Face's thugs, only to be tricked into the safe which is then hoisted up into the dark night sky by Two Face's helicopter. Batman escapes, ingeniously using the hostage's hearing aid to pick the lock. He boards the helicopter only to find that Two Face has locked the controls and parachuted to freedom. Batman dives into the harbour as the helicopter crashes into Gotham's Statue of Liberty and explodes, leaving one half of its face scarred.

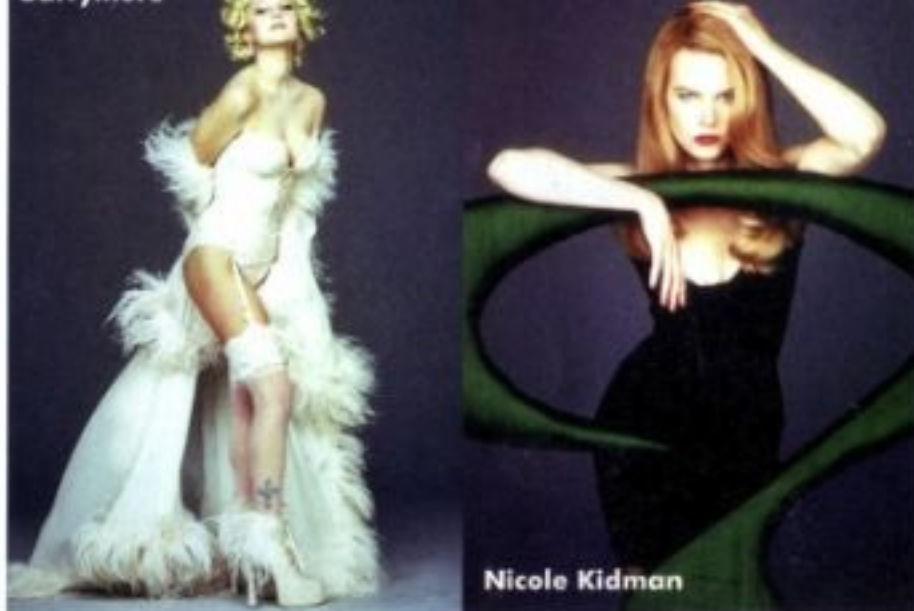
Jim Carrey is Edward Nigma (E Nigma – geddit?), a disgruntled employee of Wayne Enterprises. He is enraged when his idol Bruce Wayne refuses to fund his latest invention which beams TV signals directly into the brain. When Edward discovers that the neural energy released by the machine makes him smarter, he decides to embark on a life of crime and take revenge on the short-sighted Wayne. All he needs is a suitable *nom-de-plume*. The Puzzler? The Gamester? Captain Kill? Question Mark Man? Edward is getting desperate when it comes to him in a flash, he will become the Riddler.

The Riddler teams up with Two Face after he catches news

'Joel Schumacher lightened up the tone as well as the sets for the caped crusader.'



Drew Barrymore



Nicole Kidman

coverage of the hideously scarred one's robbery of a charity gala at the Gotham circus. During the robbery, Two Face threatens to detonate a bomb unless Batman reveals himself. Bruce Wayne, who has brought the criminal expert Dr Chase Meridian with him to the circus, tries to admit that he is Batman, but his words are lost in all the panic. Bruce cannot prevent Two Face escaping, nor can he stop him killing the Flying Graysons, circus acrobats who put up a valiant struggle against the crooks. Only Dick, the youngest of the Graysons survives, as he had been disposing of the bomb when his family were murdered.

Bruce is all too aware of the similarity between the murder of Dick's family and his own parents' death. He offers to take the young man in, and Dick grudgingly accepts. However, the young man is obsessed with getting revenge against Two Face.

The villainous duo rampage through the city, stealing the funds for Riddler's invention, and soon every home in Gotham has one of his boxes on top of their televisions. And while critics say that his invention is turning the citizen's of Gotham into zombies, Edward Nigma just shrugs – after all that's what they said about TV. And all the while, the Riddler and Two Face are getting smarter by feeding on the neural energy of Gotham's citizens.

Dick sneaks into the Batcave, and discovers Bruce's secret. But when he demands that Wayne make him his partner, his new guardian refuses. For Bruce has decided to give up his life as crime fighter, both to stop Dick following the same path, and also to live a normal life with Chase, with whom he has fallen in love. Disgusted, Dick runs away. But events will not allow Batman's alter ego to enjoy his new life. Dick is not the only one who has discovered



'Batman Forever has its heart in the optimistic comic-strips of the Fifties and Sixties.'

both Batman and Bruce Wayne. Not because he needs to be, but because he chooses to be. Cue end credits and catchy U2 tune.

If there was ever any doubt that Gotham represents New York, then the inclusion of the Big Apple's most famous landmark wipes away those doubts for good. This is a little ironic, as it is Tim Burton's first two *Batman* films that capture the oppressive, over-crowded atmosphere of the city far more intensely than the Gotham of *Batman Forever*, which is like something out of a neon-lit pantomime.

Val Kilmer is far more convincing in the Batsuit than out of it. In fact, you begin to wonder whether they need to bother casting an actor in the title role at all. For the star of the film is undoubtedly the rubber suit itself, which has single-handedly transformed the image of Batman from a faintly ridiculous man who wears his underpants over his trousers into an invincible, urban warrior. Kilmer plays Bruce Wayne competently enough, but doesn't get the chance to shine. Michael Gough's warm and wise Alfred is crucial in helping us accept Kilmer in the part. It is so much easier to believe that Kilmer and Keaton are the same man when we sense Alfred's paternalistic affection for him.

Chris O'Donnell is far more successful as the boy wonder, no mean feat considering that 30 years on, the part is still haunted by Burt Ward's camp characterization – remember the green knickers, pixie boots and American-tan tights?

If the part of the Joker had Jack Nicholson's name stamped all over it, then the Riddler was made for Jim Carrey to play. He excels as the crowned king of criminal conundrums. His way over the top performance steals almost every scene in which he appears.

While the jokes, particularly those delivered by Jim Carrey, are hilarious, the rest of the script is dull and cliché-ridden. Nicole Kidman, particularly, is forced to struggle through some terrible lines. But this doesn't really matter, as one gets the feeling that the overblown dialogue isn't meant to be uttered from actor's mouths, but appear instead in speech bubbles above the character's heads.

For *Batman Forever* has its heart in the optimistic comic-strips of the Fifties and Sixties. Fetish suits aside, the film has little to do with the grim 'adult' graphic novels of the Eighties, which inspired the first two movies. And after the po-faced pretentiousness of the second feature, *Batman Returns*, I have to say that this is no bad thing.



his secret, The Riddler uses his brain drain machine to find out Batman's real identity. He raids Wayne Manor, kidnaps Chase, destroys the Batcave, blows up the Batmobile and injures Bruce.

Alone and without the resources of the Batcave, Batman is about to lead a desperate rescue attempt, when Dick appears dressed in a rubber costume. "Who's your tailor?" Batman asks, recognizing the style. Alfred reveals that it was he who made the suit. Once again Dick asks to become Batman's partner and this time the Dark Knight agrees. Dick can't promise not to kill Two Face after the villain murdered his family. Batman nods, "A man's got to go his own way," he says, echoing Dick's own father's words. They shake gloved hands and the most famous crime fighting partnership of all time is born.

Robin confronts Two Face and beats him into submission. When the opportunity to kill him presents itself, Robin decides that he would rather see his nemesis in jail. The amoral Two Face takes advantage of the Boy Wonder's mercy and pulls a gun on him.

The Riddler meanwhile is goading Batman and boasting about his plans. With his mind reading machine, he'll soon have access to credit card numbers, bank codes, sexual fantasies and little white lies from around the globe. The Riddler has both Robin and Chase suspended over a watery grave, he insists that Batman must choose to save one of them and let the other die. For there is not enough time to save them both! Which is it to be? The love of Bruce's life or Batman's young partner?

Using his bat-a-rang, Batman destroys Riddler's machine, causing it to feedback into the crazed villain. Batman saves both Robin and Chase, for – as he tells the vanquished Riddler – he is



butler to the bat

Director Tim Burton has been replaced by Joel Schumacher, Michael Keaton has made way for Val Kilmer and then George Clooney, and the villains have come and gone. Yet through the turmoil there is one constant: **Michael Gough** has played Bruce Wayne's butler Alfred in all four Batman movies. He tells Anwar Brett about his days in service.

LIKE THE character he has played in all four Batman movies, British actor Michael Gough radiates quiet authority and avuncular charm in equal degrees. He is one of the few actors to span each of the blockbuster movies, in the role of Bruce Wayne's faithful butler/father-figure Alfred Pennyworth, and in his time has seen Batmen come and directors go, which must make his life slightly more exciting than that of your average 80-year-old.

"It's been wonderful," he chuckles, relaxed and happy in his idyllic Dorset home, "at my great age to suddenly find I'm working continually. Mind you I do find I've been working continually my whole life, pretty much."

"I had one bad moment where I was playing neurotic young men for a long time, and suddenly I got to the age of 40 and was still playing 19-year-olds. I had about a year out of work then, but I got going again and have never looked back really. I've been working ever since."

Although his feature credits include such films as *The Man in the White Suit*, *Richard III* and *Reach For the Sky*, he did for some time find himself the star of a series of low budget horror movies, like *The Black Zoo*, *Horror of Dracula* and *The Skull*.

Low grade, lowbrow entertainment they were – he cheerfully admits – no classics, although some have acquired a cult following, and can be said to have directly led to Gough's casting as Alfred in the original *Batman* movie.

"Tim Burton loves terrible films," the actor chuckles, "and he'd seen some really terrible horror films that I did. After I won a Tony Award in New York he said, 'That's the guy who's in all those terrible films, he's our Alfred!' And that was that."

Ironically Gough was a friend of Alan Napier, the actor who created the role in the '60s television series, but at the time could have had no idea that he would become so intimately involved in the mega successful series. And even while shooting the first film at Pinewood he had no way of being certain it was anything other than a one-picture deal.

"I didn't know that the first *Batman* would be so huge," he agrees, "but then whatever success it has doesn't affect me particularly. It's lovely to know, thank you very much, but it doesn't change the way I live. I get the occasional fan letters still, but not many, and nobody recognizes me in the street."

"After I'd done *Batman Returns* I came back home, and I was going round the market near where we lived at the time. When I got to the fish stall the chap there said, 'Come back from *Batman*-ing then mate?', and I said yes, he said, 'Is it a good one?' and I said it was lovely."

"The other guy on the stall asked what I had to do with *Batman*, and his mate explained that I was Alfred. 'He f*****g isn't!' he said. They argued about it, and his mate said he'd seen the film and he was sure I wasn't in it. Apparently I look very different to how I do on the screen."

Ever cheerful, Gough has remained the bedrock of Bruce Wayne's existence for the last seven years, even when Bruce Wayne has evolved from Michael Keaton to Val Kilmer – with whom Gough starred in *Top Secret!* – to the new *Batman*, George Clooney. Which puts the actor in a unique position to compare and contrast the various actors who have 'batted up' for cinema's leading superhero.

"They are all very different actors," he explains. "Michael

**"I got to the age of 40
and was still playing
19 year olds."**



Keaton's *Batman* had this thing in the back of his mind when he played the character, 'Who am I to play God?', 'Am I right to do this?', questioning the whole world he finds himself in and that lent a black side to the whole film.

"I think George's *Batman* has come to terms more with his dark side, he's a very endearing chap too, a wonderful mate. Too good-looking though, my grandchildren love him and if my mother was still with us she'd be doting on him – I ask him what it is, why does nobody say, 'Hello, aren't you lovely!' to me? But they all say how much they love George. Despite that he's totally unspoilt."

"As for Val, we got on very well together, there were no fights or anything like that. The typical thing was when Val said a line that I couldn't hear, because he has this technique of talking very quietly, I'd tell him and apologize profusely and do it again. I said the same thing to George on *Batman and Robin* and he said,

Michael Gough shows Val Kilmer around Wayne Manor for his brief stay in *Batman Forever*



'Oh Christ, I can't bear working with these old men!' I teased George, that he needed a bit of classical training like myself—even though I haven't got any either."

If the actors have been very different from one another, then so have the directors. Initially the films were filtered through Tim Burton's bleak Gothic sensibilities, but when Joel Schumacher took over for *Batman Forever* a lighter, pacier style of film resulted.

"Joel and Tim are totally different," Gough adds, "but both are very lovable. Joel is like a naughty schoolboy in a way, sometimes I feel like he's my grandson and then at other times he's like a wise old man. Tim on the other hand is almost touched by genius in a funny way, he won't give you much direction but somehow you know exactly what he means when he asks you to do something over again. He builds up this rapport so that he doesn't have to explain A, B, C, D, he can

go from A to G without pausing for breath.

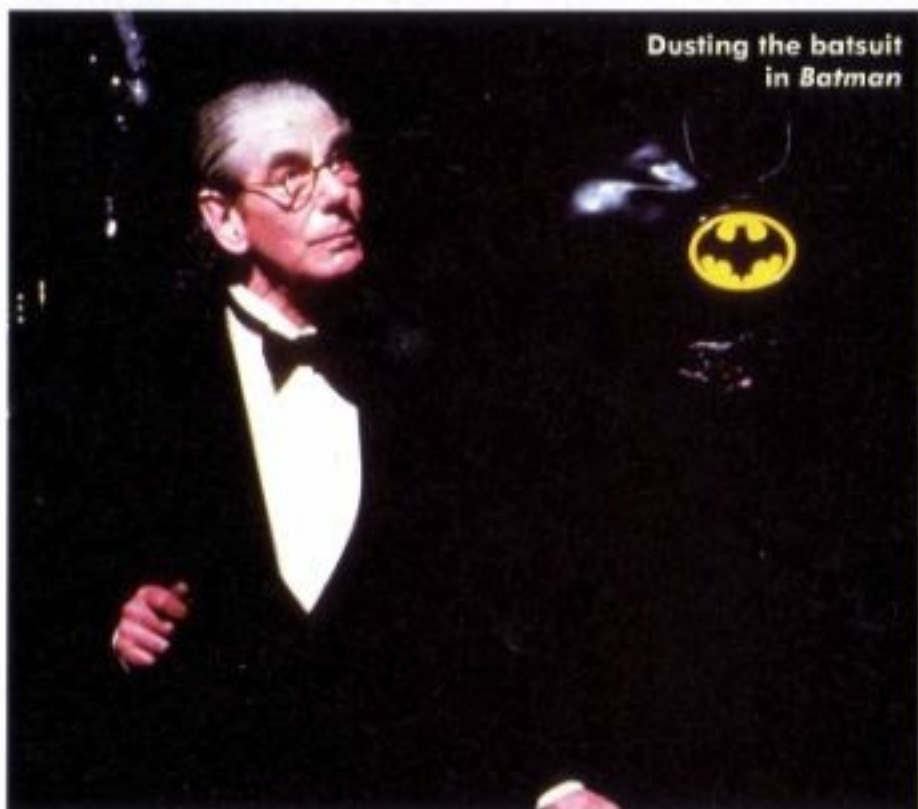
"I suppose there was a slight concern in a way when Joel came in, and I don't know what he was thinking when he first met us all, but when we drove into the parking lot on the first day he gave me a great big hug and said, 'My treasure is here at last'. We just went on from there. I trust him implicitly. That's where similarity exists really, they both trust you with your character."

"They all love George. Why does nobody say, 'Hello, aren't you lovely!' to me?"

Michael Gough reprised the role of Alfred for a BBC radio series



Dusting the batsuit in *Batman*



'I'm perfectly happy for them to do all the dirty work. I don't feel any yearning to join in.'

Wise they are too, as Gough's experience and bearing make him a talisman for the films, and along with Pat Hingle – who plays Commissioner Gordon – maintain a continuity through the series. "Pat and I never meet on screen though," he smiles, "it's just a case of 'You again? Good Lord I thought you were dead!'"

On this outing poor Alfred finds *himself* close to death's door, after contracting MacGregor's Syndrome – a little joke at the expense of producer Peter MacGregor-Scott. Suddenly Bruce Wayne's father-figure reminds the millionaire philanthropist that he will not be around to look after him forever. At the same time Bruce is having problems with his own 'surrogate child', Robin (Chris O'Donnell) who is keen to have his own car and establish a little bit of independence.

Rivalry between the Caped Crusaders grows, and is not helped by the bewitching ploys of the deadly Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman) who teams up with the equally warped Mr Freeze (Arnold Schwarzenegger) to hold Gotham City to ransom once more. Alfred plays a more crucial role in this film, introducing his niece Barbara (Alicia Silverstone) to Bruce and Dick with only the slightest hint that he expects the resourceful and surprisingly tough young lady to join our heroes as the all new Batgirl.

"I love the Hollywood experience," Gough muses, "they give you your *per diem*, and that pays for a house – one that's big enough to have my son, my daughter and my three grandchildren over with us – with a swimming pool and a Jacuzzi. They provide a car if I want it, and all that is wonderful.

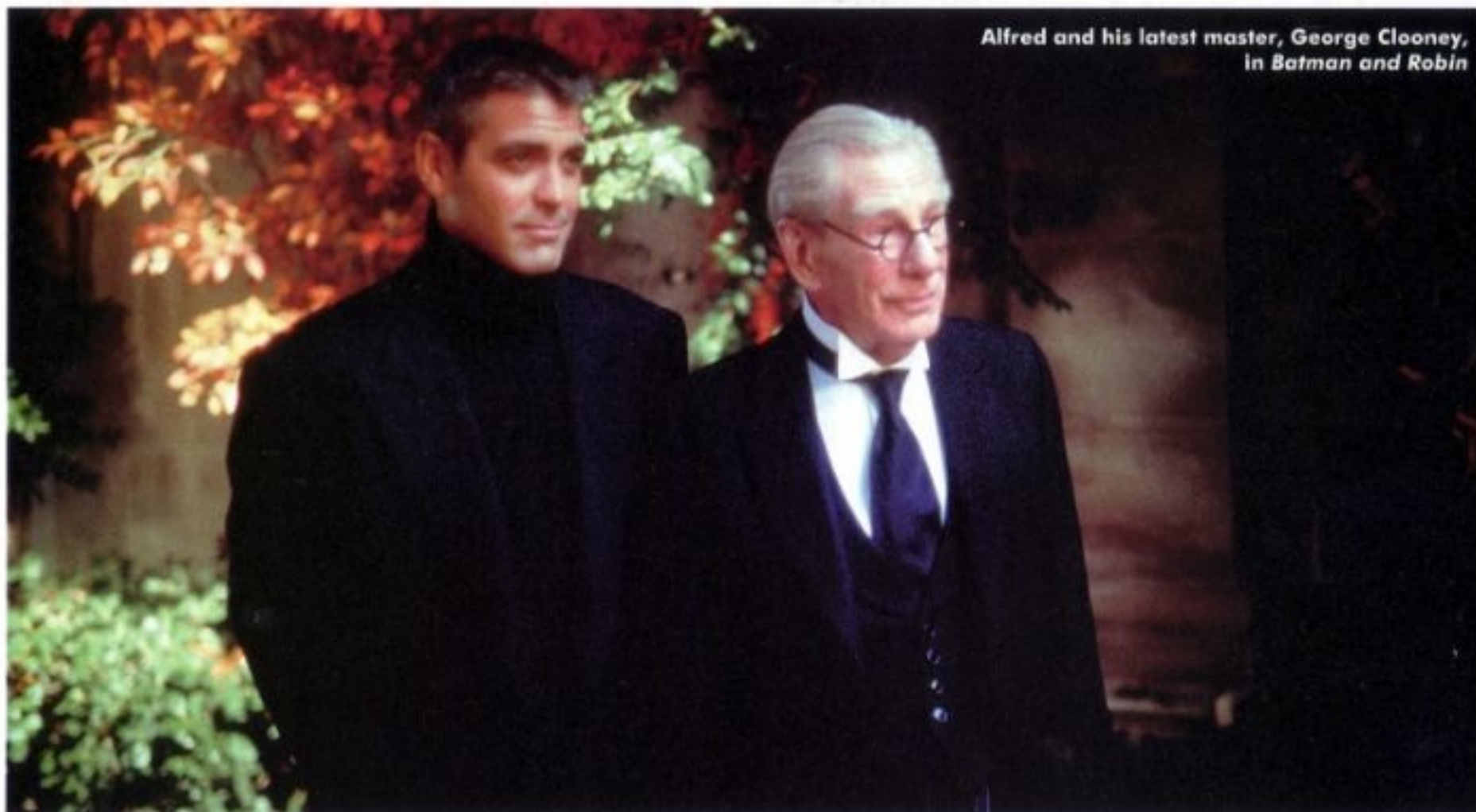
"They're very generous, especially when you've got someone like Joel Schumacher there who wants us all to be happy and comfortable. He says, 'No hassles for my actors', where so many actors are just treated like scenery by some directors. But in a way it's a sort of cossetting I can do without. Sometimes it's just too long to be away. I love being here, I love my books and pictures, and my wife although she usually comes with me."

Content with his place in *Batman* history, Michael Gough has no yearnings – such as the character himself expresses – that he would like to go out and get his hands on the bad guys for a change. "I'm perfectly happy for them to do all the dirty work," he smiles, "and for me to sit at home, I don't feel any yearning to join in with any of that at all."

Gough has, though, brought something quite distinct to the role of Alfred the Butler, a bearing and a sense of dependability that – let's face it – all our butlers exude. It was important for the actor to ensure that, for all the fantastic detail in the film his character at least should be grounded in reality.

"I based the actual job of being a butler on one who worked at a big house where I filmed once. I asked him if he minded me following him about, and he gave me all sorts of funny tips that don't come into the film but which were useful to know. They affected my attitude to people, for instance when I offered a drink to a character, I pour it and they say thank you. I was asked to say, 'You're welcome' in reply, but I said Alfred would never dream of doing that, it would be slightly creepy. You nod, but say nothing."

The mark of a good butler is clearly something in common with that of a good actor, the ubiquitous sense of place and duty to your job. For Michael Gough at least that means he is happy to reprise the role of Alfred Pennyworth for as long as he is



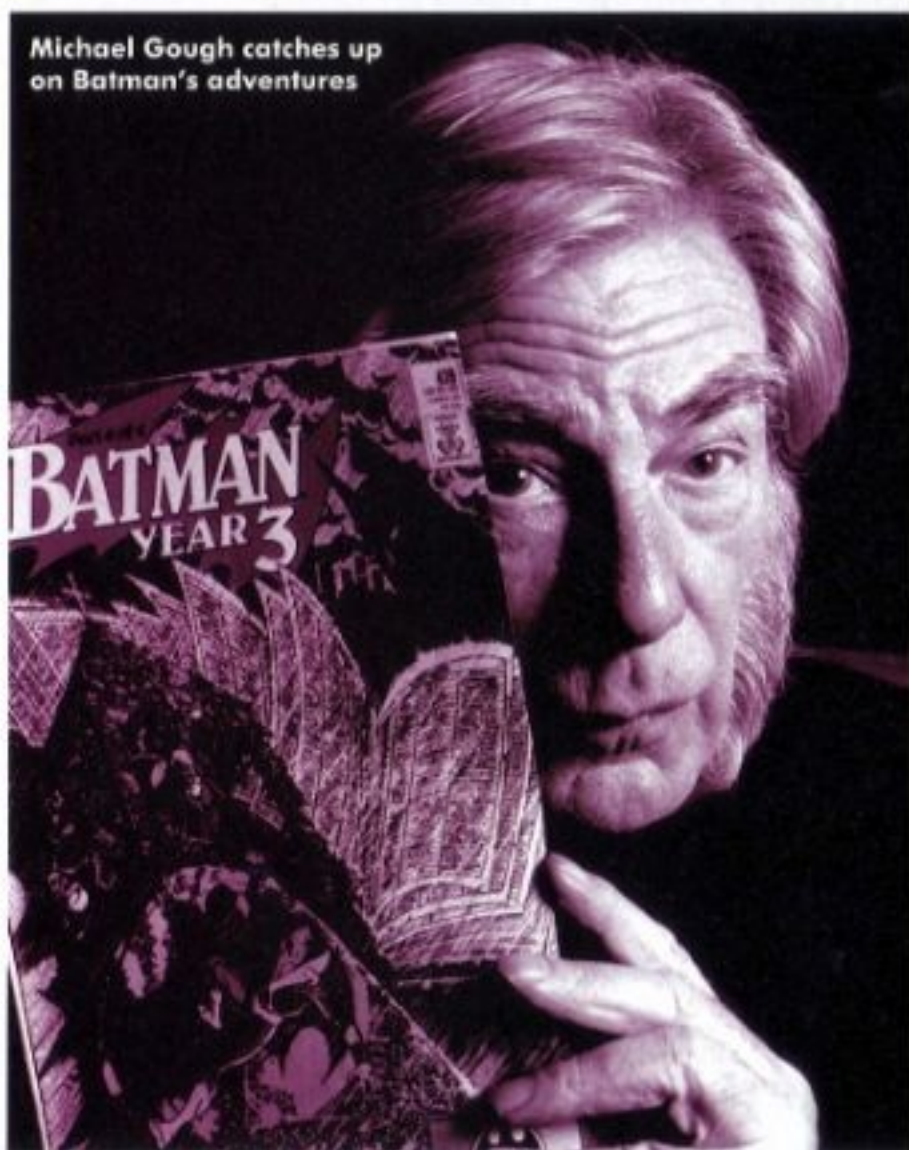
Alfred and his latest master, George Clooney, in *Batman and Robin*



Alfred and his first employer, Michael Keaton

"In a way the Derek Jarman films, the Dennis Potter films I did were more fun."

Michael Gough catches up on Batman's adventures



asked, but is just as satisfied – maybe more so – working on diverse and interesting projects that challenge his talents in other ways.

"In a way," he explains, "the Derek Jarman films, the Dennis Potter films I did were more fun. They allowed you to flex your acting muscles, and somehow you're more involved in the whole process than you are in Hollywood. In LA you're there, you do your job, they collect you, they take you there and bring you back. You're really nannied and looked after.

"But when I arrived on the set of a Derek Jarman film he'd say, 'Oh my God they haven't called you this early have they? We can't get to you until after lunch. Never mind, here's a brush, paint that set brown.'

"If you're game you can help in all sorts of ways on those films," he smiles once more, "but there's no way that would happen in Hollywood."

